

economist was that it was economically disastrous and financially ruinous. The Poor Law is the mother of idleness, "men and women growing so idle and proud that they will not work, but lie upon the parish wherein they dwell for maintenance." It discourages thrift; "if shame or fear of punishment makes him earn his daily bread, he will do no more; his children are the charge of the parish and his old age his recess from labour or care." It keeps up wages, since "it encourages wilful and evil-disposed persons to impose what wages they please upon their labours; and herein they are so refractory to reason and the benefit of the nation that, when corn and provisions are cheap, they will not work for less wages than when they were dear."¹ To the landowner who cursed the poor-rates, and the clothier who grumbled at the high cost of labour, one school of religious thought now brought the comforting assurance that morality itself would be favoured by a reduction of both.

As the history of the Poor Law in the nineteenth century was to prove, there is no touchstone, except the treatment of childhood, which reveals the true character of a social philosophy more clearly than the spirit in which it regards the misfortunes of those of its members who fall by the way. Such utterances on the subject of poverty were merely one example

of a general attitude, which appeared at times to consign to collective perdition almost the whole of the wage-earning population. It was partly that, in an age which worshipped property as the foundation of the social order, the mere labourer seemed something less than a full citizen. It was partly the result of the greatly increased influence on thought and public affairs acquired at the Restoration by the commercial classes, whose temper was a ruthless materialism, determined at all costs to conquer world-markets from France and Holland, and prepared to sacrifice every other consideration to their economic ambitions. It was partly that, in spite of a century